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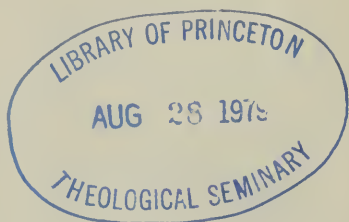
Copy of a  
Letter from the first  
Minister of the Dutch  
Reformed Church in  
America

August 11<sup>th</sup>  
1628

989 MANHATTAN in 1628, as described in the recently discovered Autograph Letter of Jonas Michaelius, written from the Settlement on the 8th of August of that year and now first published, with a review of the letter and a Historical Sketch of New Netherland to 1628, by Bingman Versteeg. 17 page and folding fac-similes and portraits. 4to. grey boards, cloth back, finely printed at the Marion Press on Holland paper. 216 pp. Edition limited to 175 copies, numbered and signed. N. Y. (Dodd, Mead), 1904. (\$16.00 net.) \$7.50

990 The Same. Printed on Japanese vellum. Limited to 50 copies, numbered and signed. (\$30.00 net.) \$15.00

One of the earliest known contemporary accounts of the present City of New York. A valuable addition to the literature of the subject. Should be in every Public Library in the State.



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THE FIRST MINISTER

OF THE

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

*Jonas Michaelis*

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THE HAGUE, PRINTED BY THE BROTHERS GIUNTA D'ALBANI.

**For private distribution.**

There has just appeared in the *Kerk-historisch Archief*, a work published periodically at Amsterdam, one of those interesting fragments, which the researches of the curious into the history of the settlement of the United States are constantly bringing, for the first time, to light. It is a letter of Jonas Michaëlius, who may now be called the first minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in the United States, written at Manhatas in New Netherland on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1628, and communicated to the work above mentioned, with such notices of the life of the writer, as existing materials permit, by Mr. J. J. Bodel Nijenhuis; who deserves well of Americans, and especially of New-Yorkers, for the zeal which prompted him to rescue this waif from oblivion, and for the industry which he has exhibited in collecting as far as possible the events in the life of the missionary. We are now carried back five years earlier in the history of the

regular ministration of the Gospel in New-York, and are enabled to add one more to the list of clergymen of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, one who, by his attainments and his holy zeal, as well as the high respect with which he was regarded by his learned brethern in Holland, is not unworthy to take his place at the head of the roll of that learned and pious body.

This letter is addressed to Dom. Adrianus Smoutius, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church at Amsterdam. It was found among the papers of the late Jacobus Korning, clerk of the fourth judicial district of Amsterdam. Further than this its history is unknown; but as Mr. Nijenhuis justly observes, it is undoubtedly to the importance of its contents that we are indebted for its preservation. Of the author, however, some few incidents interesting both as connected with his life and confirmatory of the claim now established in his behalf, have been discovered. They serve to excite our wonder that no intimation of his ministry and residence at New-Amsterdam has ever before been given. From the researches of Mr. Nijenhuis we learn that Jonas Michaëlius was born in the year 1577 in North-Holland and was educated contemporaneously with Jacob Cats and Ger. Joh. Vossius at the celebrated university of Leyden, in which as appears by its records, he was entered as student of Divinity on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1600. He was settled as minister at Nieuwbokswoude in North-Holland in 1612 and two years later at Hem in the same neighborhood. In 1624 he was, on the conquest

of St. Salvador from the Portuguese to the Dutch arms by Peter Heyn in that year, established as a minister there; but on the recovery of that place by the Portuguese in the following year, he left for Guinea and became the minister at the fort there, then recently taken from the Portuguese. He returned to Holland in 1627 and in January following, as his letter states, embarked with his wife and three children for New Netherland. He was then over fifty years of age. How long after writing his letter he remained in New Netherland is not known. He appears however in 1637 and 1638 to have been again in Amsterdam, when he was requested by the Classis of Amsterdam to return as minister to New Netherland. This he consented to do and the Classis directed an application to be made to the West India Company to send him out. This was refused after some months delay for reasons which do not appear. Whether his advanced age, or the additional expense which the company would incur, or what other reason caused the rejection of the application, is not known; the confidence which he had of the Classis of Amsterdam shows it must have been some special reason not affecting his standing as a minister. There is what appears to as an important fact in the register of these proceedings of the Classis of Amsterdam. Michaëlius is there styled "*late minister in Virginia,*" (*gewezen predikant in Virginia*), a circumstance not important, as Mr. Nijenhuis intimates, because it may thence be inferred that he emigrated from New Netherland to Virginia, for there is no possi-

ble reason why he should go there as a "*minister*" where neither the Dutch nor the French language was spoken; but as confirming the authenticity of the letter itself, which otherwise stands wholly unsupported by other testimony. It shows that Michaëlius had been in North-America as a *minister*, and the fact that he is mentioned as of Virginia, proves nothing more, taken in connection with the letter, than that the Registrar who penned the minute, had in his mind the idea, which prevailed at that time throughout Europe, and which assigned the general name of Virginia to all that portion of North-America lying between Florida on the South and New France on the North, and embracing the colonies of New-England, New-Netherland and Maryland, as well as the particular colony of Virginia.

There is, however, in the letter itself abundant intrinsic evidence of its authenticity. The nationality of the first adventurers, Walloons as well as Dutch; the place of the former residence in Europe of the Governor, Minuit; the war between the Mohawks and the Mohicans, are all stated incidentally in such a manner, that, being at the same time consistent with the facts known from other sources, they leave no reasonable ground for doubt, even without the recognition of the ministry of Mr. Michaëlius in New-Netherland by the note of registrar in the *Acta Classicialia*, of its truth.

This letter, of which a faithful translation into English is now offered, possesses a peculiar interest independently of its importance in connection with the history of the Church. It is the only letter



extant, within our knowledge, written during the first years of the settlement of New-York by any of the adventurers. While New-England is rich in this kind of material for its history, New-York is with the exception of that now presented to us, entirely barren. We read with interest the picture which the writer draws of the privations of the first settlers of New-Amsterdam, of their first cultivation of the land, of the productions of the country, and of the manners and language of the Indians, from all which the reader will derive the means of no unprofitable reflection.

HEN. C. MURPHY.

**The Hague,**

April 1. 1858.

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## DE VREDE CHRISTI.

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*Honorable Sir , Well-beloved Brother in  
Christ , Kind Friend !*

The favorable opportunity, which now presents itself of writing to your Right Reverend Sir, I can not let pass, without embracing it, according to my promise. And I first unburden myself in this communication of a sorrowful circumstance. It has pleased the Lord seven weeks after we arrived in this country to take from me my good partner, who has been to me for more than sixteen years, a virtuous, faithful and in every respect amiable yoke-fellow, and I find myself with three children very much discommoded, without her society and assistance. But what have I to say? The Lord himself has done this, in which no one can oppose Him. Wherefore I should also be willing, knowing that all things must work together for good to those who love God. I hope therefore to bear my cross patiently, and by the grace and help of the Lord, not to let the courage fail me which I stand in need of in my particular duties.

The voyage continued long, namely, from the 24<sup>th</sup> of January till the 7<sup>th</sup> of April when we first set our foot upon this land. Of storm and tempest we have had no lack, particularly about the Bermudas and the rough coasts of this country, the which fell hard upon the good wife and children, but they bore it better as regards sea-sickness and fear, than I had expected. Our fare in the ship was very poor and scanty, so that my blessed wife and children, not eating with us in the cabin, on account of the little room in it, had a worse lot than the sailors themselves; and that by reason of a wicked cook who annoyed them in every way; but especially by reason of the captain himself who, although I frequently complained of it in the most courteous manner, did not concern himself in the least, about correcting the rascal: nor did he, even when they were all sick, give them any thing which could do them any good, although there was enough in the ship; though he himself knew very well where to find it in order, out of meal-times, to fill his own belly. All the relief which he gave us, consisted merely in liberal promises, with a drunken head, which promises nothing followed when he was sober, but a sour'face, and thus has he played the brute against the officers and kept himself constantly to the wine, both at sea and especially here in the (North) river; so that he has navigated the ship daily with a wet sail and an empty head, coming ashore seldom to the Council and never to the public Divine Service. We bore all with silence on board the ship; but

it grieves me, when I think of it, on account of my wife; the more, because she was placed as she was, — not knowing whether she was preguant, and because the time was so short which she had yet to live. In my first voyage (\*) I travelled much with him, yea, lodged in the same hut, but never knew that he was such a brute and drunkard. But he was then under the direction of Mr. Lam, and now he had the principal direction himself. I have also written to Mr. Godyn about it, considering it necessary that it should be known.

Our coming here was agreable to all, and I hope, by the grace of the Lord, that my services will not be unfruitful. The people, for the most part, are all free, somewhat rough, and loose, but I find in most all of them both love and respect towards me; two things with which hitherto the Lord has every where graciously blessed my labors, and which will produce us fruit in our special calling, as Your Right Reverend yourself well knows and finds.

We have first established the form of a church (gemeente); and, as Brother Bastiaen Crol very seldom comes down from Fort Orange, because the directorship of that fort and the trade there is committed to him, it has been thought best to choose two Elders for my assistance and for the proper consideration of all such ecclesiastical matters as might occur, intending the coming year, if the Lord permit, to let one of them retire, and to choose another in his place from a double number

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(\*) To Brazil.

first lawfully presented by the congregation. One of those whom we have now chosen is the Honorable Director himself, and the other is the store-keeper of the Company, Jan Huyghen, his brother-in-law, persons of very good character, as far as I have been able to learn; having both been formerly in office in the church, the one as Deacon and the other as Elder in the Dutch and French churches, respectively, at Wesel.

We have had at the first administration of the Lords Supper full fifty communicants — not without great joy and comfort for so many — Walloons and Dutch; of whom, a portion made their first confession of the faith before us, and others exhibited their church certificates. Others had forgotten to bring their certificates with them, not thinking that a church would be formed and established here; and some, who brought them, had lost them unfortunately in a general conflagration, but they were admitted upon the satisfactory testimony of others to whom they were known and also upon their daily good deportment, since we cannot observe strictly all the usual formalities in making a beginning under such circumstances.

We administer the Holy Sacrament of the Lord once in four mouths, provisionally until a larger number of people shall otherwise require. The Walloons and French have no service on Sundays, otherwise than in the Dutch language, of which they understand very little. A portion of the Walloons are going back to the fatherland, either because their years here are expired or also because

some are not very serviceable to the Company. Some of them live far away and could not come on account of the heavy rains and storms, so that it was neither advisable nor was it possible to appoint any special service for so small a number with so much uncertainty. Nevertheless the Lord's Supper was administered to them in the French language and according to the French mode, with a preceding discourse, which I had before me in writing, as I could not trust myself extemporaneously. If in this and in other matters Your Right Reverend and the Reverend Brothers of the Consistories, who have special superintendence over us here (\*), deem it necessary to bestow upon us any correction, instruction or good advice, it will be agreeable to us and we will thank Your Right Reverend therefor; since we must have no other object than the glory of God in the building up of his kingdom and the salvation of many souls. I keep myself as far as practicable within the pale of my calling, wherein I find myself sufficiently occupied. And although our small consistory, embraces at the most — when Brother Crol is down here, — not more than four persons, all of whom, myself alone excepted, have also public business to attend to, I still hope to separate carefully the ecclesiastical from the civil matters, which occur, so that each one will be occupied with his own subject. And though many things are *mixti generis*, and political and ecclesiastical persons can greatly

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(\*) Named at the end of the letter.

assist each other, nevertheless the matters and offices tending together must not be mixed but kept separate, in order to prevent all confusion and disorder. As the council of this place consists of good people, who are, however, for the most part simple and have little experience in public affairs, I would have little objection to serve them in any serious or dubious affair with good advice, provided I considered myself capable and my advice should be asked; in which case I suppose that I would not do amiss, or be suspected by any one of being  
*α πολυπράγμων ου αλλοτριοεπισκοπος.*

In my opinion it is very expedient that the Lords Managers of this place should furnish plain and precise instructions to their Governors that they may distinctly know how to regulate themselves in all difficult occurrences and events in public matters; and at the same time that I should have all such Acta Synodalia, as are adopted in the Synods of Holland, both the special ones relating to this region and those which are provincial and national, in relation to ecclesiastical points of difficulty, or at least such of them as in the judgment of the Reverend Brothers at Amsterdam would be most likely to present themselves to us here. In the mean time I hope matters will go well here, if only on both sides we do the best in all sincerity and honest zeal; whereto I have from the first entirely devoted myself, and wherein I have also hitherto, by the grace of God, had no just cause to complain of any one. And if any dubious matters of importance happen to me, and especially if they will admit of any



delay, I will apply to the Reverend Brothers for good and prudent advice, to which I have already wholly commended myself.

As to the natives of this country I find them entirely savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as posts, proficient in all wickedness and godlessness, devilish men, who serve nobody but the Devil, that is the spirit, which, in their language, they call *manetto*: under which title they comprehend every thing that is subtle and crafty and beyond human skill and power. They have so much witchcraft, divination, sorcery and wicked tricks that they cannot be held in by any bands or locks. They are as thievish and treacherous as they are tall; and in cruelty they are more inhuman than the people of Barbary and far exceed the Africans. I have written concerning these things to several persons elsewhere, not doubting that Brother Crol will have written sufficient to Your Right Reverend or to the Lords Managers thereof; as also of the base treachery and the murders which the Mohicans at the upper part of this River, against fort Orange, had committed; but their misfortune is by the gracious interposition of the Lord, for our good; who when it pleases Him knows how to pour unexpectedly natural impulses into these unnatural men in order to hinder their designs. How these people can best be led to the true knowledge of God and of the Mediator Christ is hard to say. I cannot myself wonder enough who it is who has imposed so much upon Your Right Reverend and

many others in the Fatherland concerning the docility of these people and their good nature, the proper *principia religionis* and *vestigia legis naturæ* which should be among them; in whom I have as yet been able to discover hardly a single good point, except that they do not speak so jeeringly and so scoffingly of the godlike and glorious majesty of their Creator, as the Africans dare to do. But it is because they have no certain knowledge of Him, or scarcely any. If we speak to them of God, it appears to them like a dream: and we are compelled to speak of Him not under the name of Menotto, whom they know and serve, – for that would be blasphemy, – but under that of some great persons, yea, of the Chiefs Sackiema, – by which name they, – living without a king, – call those who have the command over any hundreds among them and who by our people are called Sackemakers, the which their people hearing, some will begin to mutter and shake their heads as of a silly fable, and others in order to express regard and friendship to such a proposition, will say *Oritk*, that is, *good*. Now, by what means are we to make an inroad or practicable breach for the salvation of this people? I take the liberty on this point of enlarging somewhat to Your Right Reverend.

Their language which is first thing to be employed with them, methinks is entirely peculiar. Many of our common people call it an easy language, which is soon learned, but I am of a contrary opinion. For those who can understand

their words to some extent and repeat them, fail greatly in the pronunciation and speak a broken language, like the language of Ashdod. For these people have difficult aspirates and many guttural letters which are formed more in the throat than by the mouth, teeth and lips, which our people not being accustomed to, guess at by means of their signs, and then imagine that they have accomplished something wonderful. It is true one can learn as much as is sufficient for the purposes of trading, but this occurs almost as much by signs with the thumb and fingers as by speaking; which could not be done in religious matters. It also seems to us that they rather design to conceal their language from us than to properly communicate it, except in things which happen in daily trade; saying that it is sufficient for us to understand them in those: and then they speak only half their reasons, with shortened words; and frequently call a dozen things and even more by one name; and all things which have only a rude resemblance to each other they frequently call by the same name. In truth it is a made up childish language: so that even those who can best of all speak with the Indians and get along well in trade, are nevertheless wholly in the dark and bewildered when they hear the Indians speaking with each other by themselves.

Let us then leave the parents in their condition and begin with the children who are still young. So it should be. But they must be separated in youth from their parents, yea, from their whole

nation. For, without this, they would be as much given as their parents to heathenish tricks and deviltries, which are kneaded naturally in their hearts by themselves through a just judgment of God; so that having once obtained deep root, by habit, they can with difficulty be wholly eradicated therefrom. But this separation is hard to effect; for the parents have a strong affection for their children and are very loth to part with them: and, when they are separated from them, — as we have already had proof, — the parents are never contented, but take them away stealthily or induce them to run away themselves. Nevertheless we must, — although it would be attended with some expense, — obtain the children through a sense of gratitude on the part of their parents and with their consent, by means of presents and promises; in order to place them under the instruction of some experienced and godly schoolmaster, where they may be instructed not only to speak read and write in our language, but also especially in the fundamentals of our Christian religion, and where besides they will see nothing but good examples and virtuous lives; but they must speak their native tongue sometimes among themselves in order not to forget it, as being evidently a principal means of spreading the knowledge of religion through the whole nation. In the meantime it must not be forgotten to pray to the Lord, with ardent and continual prayers, for his blessing, Who can make things which are unseen to be quickly and conveniently seen, Who gives life to the dead, calls as nothing

that which is, and being rich in mercy has pity on whom he will: as He has compassionated our people to be his people, when we before were not pitied and were not his people, and has washed us clean, sanctified us and justified us, when we were covered all over with all manner of corruption, calling us to the blessed knowledge of his Son and from the power of darkness to his marvellous light. And this I regard so much the more necessary as the wrath and malediction of God, which have been found to rest upon this miserable people hitherto, are the more severe. May God have mercy upon them finally, that the fulness of the heathen may be gradually accomplished and the salvation of our God may be here also seen among these wild and savage men. I hope to keep a watchful eye over these people and to learn as much of their language as will be practicable, and to seek better opportunities for their instruction than hitherto it has been possible to find.

As to what concerns myself and my household; I find myself by the loss of my good and helping partner very much hindered and distressed, - for my two little daughters are yet small: maidservants are not here to be had, at least none whom they advise me to take: and the Angola slaves are thievish, lazy and useless trash. The young man whom I took with me, I discharged after Whitsuntide, for the reason that I could not employ him out of doors at any working of the land and in doors he was a burden to me instead of an assistance. He is now elsewhere at service with the boers.

The promises which the Lords Masters of the Company had made me of some acres or surveyed lands for me to make myself a home, instead of a free table which otherwise belonged to me, is wholly of no avail. For their Honors well know that there are no horses, cows or laborers to be obtained here for money. Every one is short in these particulars and wants more. The expense would not trouble me, if an opportunity only offered; as it would be for our own accommodation, although there were no profit from it (save that the Honorable Managers owe me as much as the value of a free table); for there is here no refreshment of butter, milk etc. to be obtained, although a very high price be offered for them; for the people who bring them and bespeak them are suspicious of each other. So I will be compelled to pass through the winter without butter and other necessaries which the ships did not bring with them to be sold here. The rations, which are given out and charged for high enough, are all hard stale food, as they are used to on board ship, and frequently this is not very good, and there cannot be obtained as much of it as may be desired. I began to get some strength through the grace of the Lord, but in consequence of this hard fare of beans and grey peas, which are hard enough, barley, stockfish, etc. without much change, I cannot become well as I otherwise would. The summer yields something, but what of that for any one who has no strength? The Indians also bring some things, but one who has no wares, such as knives, beads and the like

or seewan, cannot have any good of them. Though the people trade such things for proper wares, I know not whether it is permitted by the laws of the Company. I have now ordered from Holland most all necessaries: but expect to pass through the winter with hard and scanty food.

The country yields many good things for the support of life, but they are all to be gathered in an uncultivated and wild state. It is necessary that there should be better regulations established, and people who have the knowledge and the implements for gathering things in their season, should collect them together, as undoubtedly will gradually be the case. In the meanwhile I wish the Lords Managers to be courteously inquired of, how I can have the opportunity to possess a portion of land, and at my own expense to support myself upon it? For as long as there is no more accommodation to be obtained here from the country people, I would be compelled to order every thing from the Fatherland at great expense, and with much risk and trouble, or else live here upon these poor and hard rations alone, which would badly suit me and my children. We want ten or twelve farmers with horses, cows and laborers in proportion, to furnish us with bread and fresh butter, milk and cheese. There are convenient places which can be easily protected and very suitable: which can be bought from the Indians for trifling toys, or could be occupied without risk; because we have more than enough shares which have never been cleared but have been always reserved

for that purpose. The business of furs is dull on account of a new war of the *Maechibaecys* (Mohawks) against the Mahicans at the upper end of this river. There have occurred cruel murders on both sides. The Mohicans have fled and their lands are unoccupied, and are very fertile and pleasant. It grieves us that there are no people, and that there is no regulation of the Lords Managers to occupy the same. They fell much wood here to carry to the Fatherland but the vessels are too few to take much of it. They are making a windmill to saw the wood: and we also have a gristmill. They bake brick here but it is very poor. There is good material for burning lime, namely, oystershells, in large quantities. The burning of potash has not succeeded; the master and his laborers are all greatly disappointed. We are busy now in building a fort of good quarry stone, which is to be found not far from here in abundance. May the Lord only build and watch over our walls. There is a good means for making salt; for there are convenient places, the water is salt enough and there is no want of heat in summer. Besides as to the waters, both of the sea and rivers, they yield all kinds of fish; — and as to the land, it abounds in all kinds of game, wild and in the groves, with vegetables, fruits, roots, herbs, and plants, both for eating and medicinal purposes, working wonderful cures, which are too long to relate, and which, were it ever so pertinent, I could not tell. Your Right Reverend has already obtained some knowledge thereof in part and will



be able to obtain from others further information. The country is good and pleasant; the climate is healthy, notwithstanding the sudden changes of cold and heat. The sun is very warm; the winter strong and severe, and continues full as long as in our country. The best remedy is not to spare the wood – of which there is enough, – and to cover oneself well with rough skins which can also easily be obtained. The harvest – God be praised – is in the barns and is better gathered than ever before. The ground is fertile enough to reward labor, but they must clean it well, and manure and cultivate it the same as our lands require. It has hitherto happened much worse because, many of the people are not very laborious or could not obtain their proper necessaries for want of bread. But it now begins to go on better and it would be entirely different now if the Masters would only send good laborers and make regulations of all matters, in order, with what the land itself produces, to do for the best.

I had promised (to write) to the Honorable Brothers, Rudolphus Petri, Joannes Sylvius, and Dom. Cloppenburg, who with your Honor were charged with the superintendence of these regions (\*); but as this would take long, and the time is short, and my occupations at the present time

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(\*) Mr. Nijenhuis states that it was so committed to some of the Ministers of Amsterdam by the Synod of North-Holland; and the Ministers above mentioned were all at that time active Ministers at Amsterdam, where Sylvius and Triglandius had been since 1610, Petri since 1612 and Cloppenburg since 1621.

many, will Your Right Reverend be pleased to give my friendly and kind regards to their Reverends and to excuse me, on condition that I remain their debtor to fulfil my promise, – God willing, – by the next voyage. Will you also give my sincere respects to the Reverend Dom. Triglandius and to all the Brothers of the consistory besides, to all of whom I have not thought it necessary to write particularly at this time, as they are made by me participants in these tidings and are content to be fed from the hand of Your Right Reverend. If it shall be convenient for your Honor, or any of the Reverend Brothers to write hither to me a letter concerning matters which might be important in any degree to me, it would be very interesting to me, living here in a savage land without any society of our order, and would be a spur to write more assiduously to the Reverend Brothers concerning what might happen here. And especially do not forget my hearty salutation to the beloved wife and brother in law of Your Right Reverend who have shown me nothing but friendship and kindness above my deserts. If there is anything in which I can in return serve or gratify Your Right Reverend, I will be glad to do so and will not be behind hand in any thing. Concluding then herewith and commending myself in Your Right Reverend's favorable and holy prayers to the Lord,

Honored and Learned Sir, Beloved Brother in Christ and Kind Friend;

Commending Your Right Reverend and all of you

to Almighty God, by His Grace, to continued health and prosperity and to eternal salvation of heart.

From the Island of Manhatas in New-Netherland this 11<sup>th</sup> August Anno 1628, by me Your Right Reverend's obedient in Christ,

JONAS MICHAËLIUS.

(Endorsed.) The Honorable Learned and pious Mr. Adrian Smoutius, faithful Minister of the Holy Gessel of Christ in His Church, dwelling upon the Heerengracht not far from the House of the West-India Company, Amsterdam. By the care of a friend whom God preserve.

(Sealed with a wafered signet not discernible.)

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